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ABSTRACT

Mass education in the United States from its inception was concerned with inculcating routine abilities, simple computation, reading basal texts, and reciting religious and civic codes. It did not take into consideration interpretation or creativity. Native Americans have had difficulty fitting into this mold of standardization. Traditional Native American teaching centered on interpretation and creativity. The use of legends and fables for teaching important life skills and understanding the world around them encouraged students to become independent creative thinkers. Students of traditional teachers were proficient in language and problem solving. Understanding and interpreting the message of stories was one of the primary means of teaching language and critical thinking. We propose a curriculum model which relies on traditional teaching methods and uses Native American legends and fables to encourage the development of language proficiency and critical thinking. The model is based on oral tradition, but expands to include recent trade books written about Native American life and legends. It reflects the change from a single society to that of a more global world bringing in stories from various tribal groups. It is intended to enhance proficiency in both native language and English. The model brings back to Native Americans the traditional teaching which encouraged interpretation and creativity and makes them the center of the curriculum. (Author)

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USING TRADITIONAL TEACHING TO EXPAND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND CRITICAL THINKING

A paper presented at the

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Native American Language Issues Institute

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by

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Abstract
Using Traditional Teaching to Expand
Language Development and Critical Thinking

Mass education in the United States from its inception was concerned with inculcating routine abilities, simple computation, reading basal texts, and reciting religious and civic codes. It did not take into consideration interpretation or creativity. Native Americans have had difficulty fitting into this mold of standardization. Traditional Native American teaching centered on interpretation and creativity. The use of legends and fables for teaching important life skills and understanding of the world around them encouraged students to become independent creative thinkers. Students of traditional teachers were proficient in language and problem solving. Understanding and interpreting the message of stories was one of the primary means of teaching language and critical thinking.

We propose a curriculum model which relies on traditional teaching methods and uses Native American legends and fables to encourage the development of language proficiency and critical thinking. The model is based on oral tradition, but expands to include recent trade books written about Native American life and legends. It reflects the change from a single society to that of a more global world bringing in stories from various tribal groups. It is intended to enhance proficiency in both the native language and English.

The model brings back to Native Americans the traditional teaching which encouraged interpretation and creativity and makes them the center of the curriculum.

Using Traditional Teaching to Expand Language Development and Critical Thinking

We propose a model for teaching which focuses on traditional teaching as a means for expanding language development and critical thinking.

Before presenting the model, we must take a look at what is meant by traditional teaching. We must look at the ways knowledge was passed from generation to generation in Native American communities. We know that knowledge was shared verbally. Truths embedded in stories and legends were the primary means of encouraging children to behave and to become industrious.

Everyday tasks, however, were done through direct instruction with modeling as the key element. At the turn of the century a Havasupai, Sinyella, gave the following description of instruction to Leslie Spier, who later wrote Havasupai Ethnography. " Children are taught to talk and walk. When they begin to walk, we tell them; 'Go fetch this thing for me;' thus telling the names of objects. Then they will know how to talk as people do. When girls begin to talk, their mothers instruct them how to fetch water and wood: 'That is the way I carry things.' They teach them how to grind corn: 'When growing things are ripe, you must gather them. That is what a woman does. When you are grinding for the first time, look for the rat's burrow and observe how he has piled up the dirt at the entrance; then when you grind corn or seeds, make your pile of meal a little larger than that.'" This description also shows the importance of the visual aspect to learning. Early instruction was direct, hands on, visual and used modeling.

Today's research in direct instruction emphasizes the use of modeling and hands on instruction. What we are beginning to identify as keys to learning and effective instruction were the ways used for early instruction in Native American communities.

Between the ages of 10 and 12 children moved from learning by direct instruction to using more critical thinking. At early ages children were exposed to stories and legends, but paid little attention to the meaning of these stories and legends. Around the age of 10 they were encouraged to listen to the stories for more meaning. Most of the stories and legends did not have apparent meaning. Similes and metaphors were common. Meaning was not easy to come by. It often took more than one telling of the story for the listener to understand the message.

When this method of teaching is contrasted with what is now defined as higher order thinking we see many similarities:

1. Higher order thinking is nonalgorithmic. That is, the path of action is not fully specified in advance.

2. Higher order thinking tends to be complex. The total path is not "visible" (mentally speaking) from any single vantage point.

3. Higher order thinking often yields multiple solutions, each with costs and benefits, rather than unique solutions.

4. Higher order thinking involves nuanced judgment and interpretation.

5. Higher order thinking involves the application of multiple criteria, which sometimes conflict with one another.

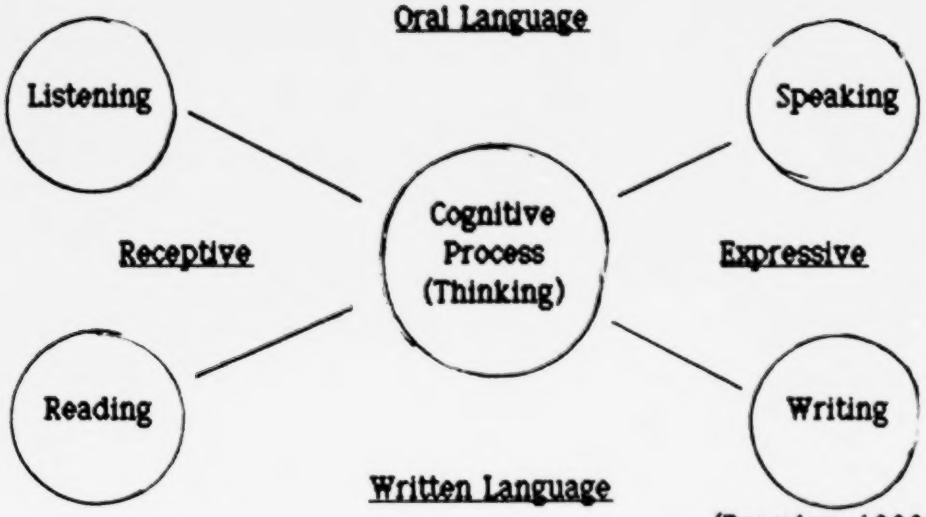
6. Higher order thinking often involves uncertainty. Not everything that bears on the task at hand is known.

7. Higher order thinking involves self-regulation of the thinking process. We do not recognize higher order thinking in an individual when someone else "calls the plays" at every step.

8. Higher order thinking involves imposing meaning, finding structure in apparent disorder.

9. Higher order thinking is effortful. There is considerable mental work involved in the kinds of elaborations and judgments required (Resnick, 1987).

Recent language and literacy research continues to support salient features of traditional teaching. The components of the language arts are viewed as dynamic, whole and interrelated. Because all the processes are linked, a child's experiences in one process support development in the other dimensions as shown in this model:



(Bromley, 1988: 5)

Figure 1

The language learner actively selects, uses, stores and relates language to cognitive processes as effective and creative communication skills are developed. This is a naturalistic view of language learning which supports a whole language curriculum as defined by Goodman's criteria:

Language Learning is Best Developed When

1. It's real and natural.
2. It's whole.
3. It's sensible.
4. It's interesting.
5. It's relevant.
6. It belongs to the learner.
7. It's part of a real event.
8. It has social utility.
9. It has purpose for the learner.
10. The learner chooses to use it.
11. It's accessible to the learner.
12. The learner has power to use it. (Goodman, 1986: 8)

As previously noted, traditional methods of teaching used stories, myths and legends as vehicles of instruction. Hardy (1978) has explored the psychology of story and believes that story is a primary act of mind. She suggests that humans readily translate and respond to the experiences and ideas conveyed by stories. They offer us layers of meaning to become involved in and assign private and universal meaning to.

There is much support for the use of traditional and contemporary children's literature in the curriculum. Many fine retellings or translations of Native American myths and legends are available such as McDermott's Arrow to the Sun and Goble's The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses. Both men have been recognized for producing books which retain the integrity of the original tales. McDermott has stated, "The goal of my quest as author and illustrator is to give contemporary voice and form to traditional tales; to release the spirit of the story through my own words and pictures to infuse it with my own spirit, emotions and energy." In addition contemporary Native Americans are credibly portrayed in two recent novels. The Newberry honor book Dog Song by Paulsen and Speare's book Sign of the Beaver. As more books featuring the Native American culture become available, teachers must become aware of evaluative criteria for selecting credible choices. Livo has developed some valuable criteria and also a bibliography of noted books. These books can be bridges between the native and mainstream cultures. For literature is viewed as a natural and meaningful foundation for involving children in using all the components of the language arts. According to Huck and Cullenan children are immersed in rich language as they hear, tell, read and write stories.

Rosenblatt (1968) proposed a transactional theory of literature. This transaction is an individual process and involves the reader in actively imposing meaning. In the transactional model the reader's prior knowledge is the key determiner of comprehension. This transaction also occurs as we listen to stories and must visualize images and create meaning for ideas shared. In recognizing the importance of relevance, prior knowledge and story to the development of literacy and cognition, we validate a curriculum incorporating traditional methods and a whole language/literature based framework.

Mass education in the United States from its inception was concerned with inculcating routine abilities, simple computation, reading basal texts, and reciting religious and civic codes. It did not emphasize interpretation or creativity. Traditional Native American teaching centered on interpretation and creativity. The use of legends and fables for teaching important life skills and understanding of the world

around them encouraged students to become independent creative thinkers. Students of traditional teachers were proficient in language and problem solving. Understanding and interpreting the message of stories was one of the primary means of teaching language and critical thinking.

The conflict between traditional teaching and mass education in the United States has led Native Americans to failure in the public schools systems. P.E. Vernon talks about several types of intelligence. The first type is inherited intelligence. This type of intelligence cannot be measured or observed, but it is the mother of all measured intelligences. The second type is the result of culture and environment acting on inherited intelligence. Culture plays an important part in this type of intelligence. There is variance from culture to culture. Members of every known population or culture categorize, remember, generalize, form concepts, operate with abstraction and reason logically, but they may categorize differently, remember differently and differ in logical reasoning. The result of culture and environment on their inherited intelligence is very important. Type 2 intelligence is not fixed and may change in a different environment. The third type of intelligence is the part of Type 2 we measure with an IQ test. We know that different cultures value different cognitive skills and behavior. We know that the IQ test for the United States differs from the one in Japan and it differs from the original IQ test developed by Binet in France. Each includes variables from different cultures. If we were to go to France or Japan and take their intelligence test we would score differently than if we took the one developed for the United States. The U.S. test was developed from and standardized on white middle class American children (Ogbu, 1988).

John Ogbu says that it is impossible to come up with a culture or bias free test when we define culture simply by objects and vocabulary. There are other differences that are more subtle.

He offers a more productive difference by dividing minorities into what he calls voluntary and involuntary. Immigrants are voluntary minorities; e.g. people who came to this country because they wanted to become a part of it. They were looking for economic security or religious freedom. They became assimilated into mainstream culture after a generation or two, rejecting their language and encouraging their children to become "Americans".

There then is the involuntary minority which includes Native Americans. These people have not tried to become a part of mainstream America, but were forced into it. At the same time, economic, social and political barriers have kept them

from becoming a part of the mainstream. Out of preference and necessity in some cases they have chosen to remain within their own culture. They have placed a high value on their own culture and wish to remain separate. Often they develop an opposition strategy. Opportunity to remain separate is important. The strengths of varied cultures, languages and traditional teaching have value as a means to meet the demands of today's world and for enriching the sequential, essentially uncreative culture that dominates them. A nonthreatening instructional method, one they are comfortable with and one they can use to develop critical thinking skills necessary for coping with this world without losing their own strengths is possible through the use of traditional teaching methods.

We propose a model for teaching using traditional methods to help bridge the gap that has existed in the past. One that is less threatening and will result in higher ability to think sequentially or divergently.

We have chosen a curriculum model which Glatthorn (1987) defines as the "Naturalistic Model." It tends to be a "top-down" process, moving from the larger unit to the smaller lesson. It seems to be more in accord with the way teachers actually plan. It gives equal weight to objectives, activities and materials, rather than giving primary attention to objectives. The advantages of the model are that it is more responsive to the political realities of curriculum making and is in accord with teaching planning styles. It should also result in more interesting and challenging learning experiences, since it emphasizes the intrinsic quality of the experience.

The Naturalistic Model

Consider Objectives

Consider Materials

Develop
Quality
Learning
Experiences

Consider Activities

Figure 2 (Glatthorn, 1987)

The intent is to develop plans for quality learning experiences--meaningful learning transactions mediated by the teacher. Such quality learning experiences should meet several important criteria.

1. The learning experience is meaningful--it provides an opportunity for students to discover meaning, to make sense of their experience, to integrate knowledge.

2. The learning experience is involving--its nature is such that it is likely to involve all students, not just a few, in the active processing of experience. Some of hat active processing will be mental, and perhaps not always observable, but it will not be passive receiving of information.

3. The learning experience is multiple--it requires the use of many learning styles, modalities and talents.

4. The learning experience is challenging--it requires the students to acquire new information, but also to process that information, to synthesize it, to apply it, and to create new forms.

5. The learning experience is appropriate--for both the context (the school classroom) and the participants (the students and the teacher).

6. The learning experience is relevant--it relates directly to the unit objective. It is not included simply because it is interesting (Glatthorn, 1987).

Instead of using the standard curriculum guide, the naturalistic process culminates in the production and dissemination of learning scenarios for each unit of study. A learning scenario is more flexible and open-ended to assist the teacher in implementing the new course. It includes the following components:

1. A clear and detailed statement of the unit objective.
2. A suggested number of lessons.
3. A list of recommended quality learning experiences, phrased in a way that integrates objectives, activities, and materials.
4. Reprints of articles, maps, and photographs that teacher could use in making lesson plans. Resources are not just listed, they are included.

A traditional story will be used to model a lesson based on these principles.

Coyote and His Family

They lived in the desert where cactus and soapweed grew. There were many rats in the desert. Coyote had one son and the rest were daughters. The boy was small. Coyote was getting old so part of his upper and lower teeth had fallen out. He had only a few left. He wondered how he could replace his teeth. His daughters were grown and ready to marry. They were good looking. Coyote tried to think how he could marry one or both of is own daughters.

They went hunting with the boy in the desert all day for rats, and returned in the evening.

Coyote took shiny jasper rocks and thought he would make himself some teeth. They came back from hunting. One evening Coyote pretended he had a bad headache. He had two wives. The next day he said it was worse and said he didn't think he would live. He pretended to get worse. He told his wives and daughters that the daughters were big enough to marry, and told them if some man came around at night after he was dead not to whip him or chase him away but let him come to them.

In a few days he told them they should pack his body over to a high ridge, over the other side where there was a lot of dry wood. He told them to pile it high and start a fire on four sides, then leave. "Don't wait and watch me, as I'll be smelly. It isn't good for you to stay and smell that bad odor. Run back to camp and don't dare to turn back to look at the fire. It will burn me up so I can't come alive. I believe there is a man coming to our home. Let him come in and lay close to my daughters if he wants to. That means he is a good hunter and will hunt food and feed you folks."

A few days later Coyote died. His wives wrapped him in a rug and sewed it up. They took hold of his feet and head, with the kids on the sides and carried him away to the ridge. They gathered wood and started a fire on four sides. It blazed up hard and they saw it was burning good so they said, "Let's go back home. The man said not to look back at the fire." They started home crying along the way. They were lonesome.

Four nights later someone who looked like a man came to the door. He walked slowly to the bed of the two big daughters and lay between them. They didn't chase him away. Before morning he took the boy with him and went hunting rats.

When Coyote died he was just make believe. When the women were quite a ways off, Coyote rose up and saw the fire close but not near enough to burn him. The women were going over the ridge and couldn't see him so he jumped off the fire and got his blankets. He stayed near that place. He hunted jasper rocks and made teeth to fill all the places where he had no teeth. He thought he was now a better man than before so his daughters wouldn't know him with his new teeth. He felt inside and blew and found the teeth were tight fitting and wouldn't come out easy so he thought he could eat anything.

After that he took his small son out hunting early when it was still a little dark. They hunted rats and returned home later. One day his son tried to scare a rat by poking the rat's nest with a long stick to chase it out. Coyote was waiting nearby for it to come out. The rat would come out, sit a minute, then run. One place they had a hard time. The rat didn't come out when the boy poked the nest. Coyote took an arrow and poked the nest and made a blowing noise, "Sh-h." His teeth were loose and came out so the boy recognized him. The boy got excited and Coyote was afraid of the boy. The boy was afraid and ran toward home. Coyote chased him but the boy was fast and Coyote couldn't get him. Near home, the boy cried out, "My mother, the man is my father." The family heard him and everyone came outside. The wives though he was dead, so they said, "That's a ghost. Let's run off away from the house." So all the family ran toward the East. Coyote never caught up with the women. He chased them quite a ways, stopped and returned home. He was lonely and just wandered from one place to another. That was the start of Coyote living as a solitary wanderer.

The women ran on to the east, climbed up on the sky and turned into stars. Some folks say this is the Little Dipper (Smithson, 1971:89-91).

The tale is multilayered and communicates vital social/cultural information. The story explains why coyote is solitary, stresses the importance of accepting age and familial structure and avoiding deceit, and describes courting and burial rituals. As a literacy piece the tale exemplifies the use of the trickster and transformation motifs. Using this piece as a focus, learning experiences can be planned which will support our model.

One way to plan for instruction is to develop a web of possibilities. According to Huck (1987) a web is, "...a kind of visual brainstorm that helps teachers to generate ideas and link them to a theme or central focus. The web is centered on the needs, interests and capabilites of the children who will explore the topic. For our purposes a web could focus on coyote tales.

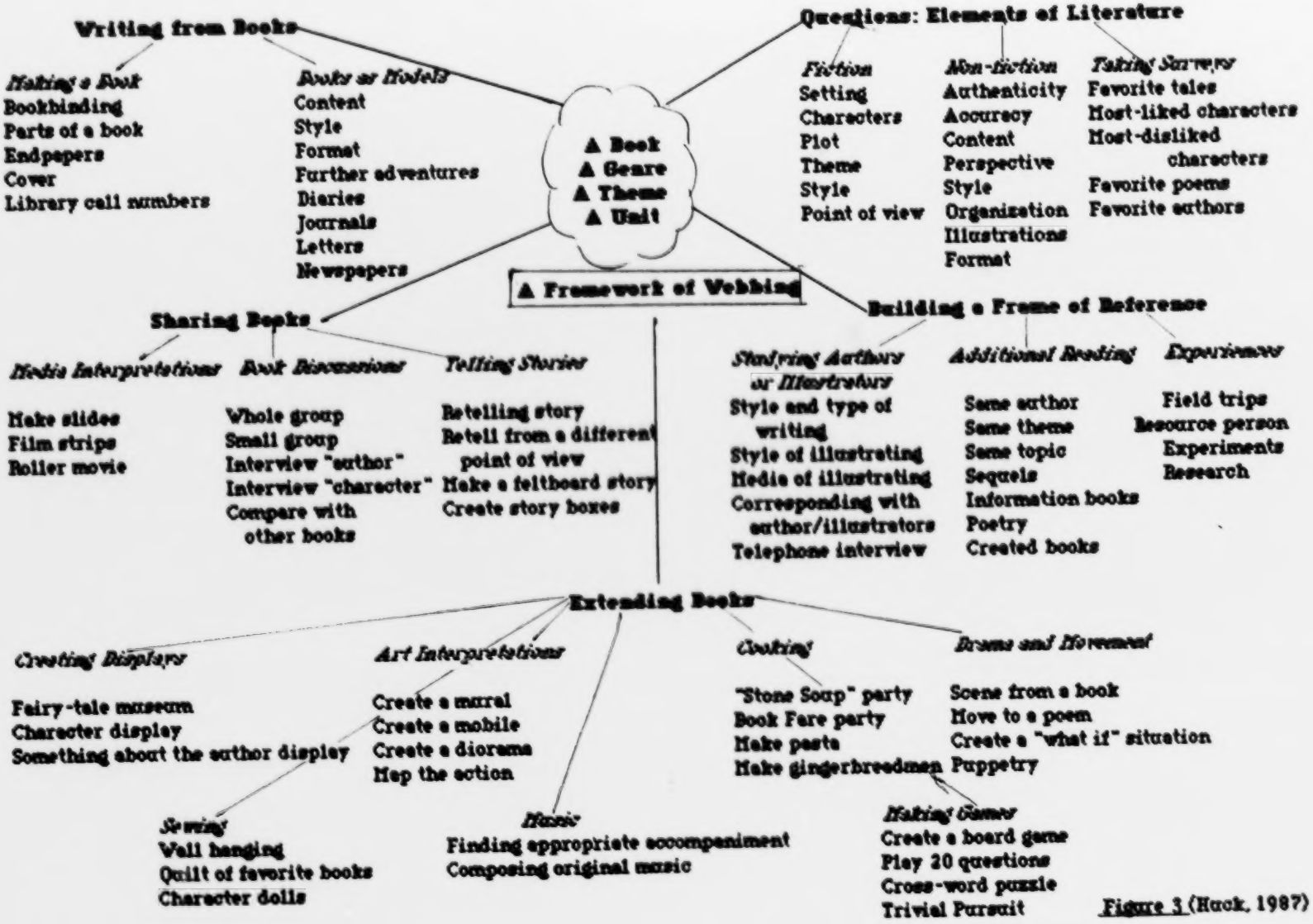


Figure 3 (Huck, 1987)

A literary/language focus would stress discovering patterns; a social/cultural focus would center on identifying cultural truths. The web would also be planned to promote the integration of the language arts and would include the use of quality trade books. This plan reflects both Glatthorn and Goodman's descriptions of rich curriculum.

A teacher might choose our illustrative tale as the focus of a lesson. To first access and develop students' schema, the class would brainstorm what they know about other coyote tales. Next, a native storyteller could share the story or it could be read silently. Each student should spontaneously react to the story in journals during this time. Then, the group should be involved in oral retelling. Next possible meanings are explored and major ideas discussed. Finally individuals rewrite the story. These versions will incorporate the student's view of the tale. As a culminating activity to a unit on coyote tales students will be asked to write original coyote tales.

As educators become more aware of the value of traditional teaching basal reader publishers are including selections featuring traditional Native American literature or contemporary Native American literature. Often proposed instructional sequences do not promote a global understanding or appreciation of the pieces because they are treated superficially. For instance little schema or background is developed before students interact with the piece. There is little chance that the students establish personal relevancy or see a purpose for the learning. The proposed lessons are also so structured that teachers would be directing the thinking. Further questions to be posed are representative of lower level cognition. We must reject these artificial attempts in favor of adopting the type of model we propose.

History indicates that Native Americans were not satisfied with the education they received which included routine abilities, simple computation and reading basal texts. As early as 1744 the Chief of Six Nations reportedly told Washington in response to his offer to educate Indian people:

Several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your science; but when they came back to us, they were bad runners; ignorant of every means of living in the woods; unable to bear either cold or hunger; knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy; spoke our language imperfectly: were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors or counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are,

however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them (Adams, 1974: 21).

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